

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

EA-06 FRB-03 INR-07 IO-10 NEA-09 NSAE-00 RSC-01

OPIC-03 SP-02 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01

SS-15 NSC-05 H-01 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 /103 W

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R 231724Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6108

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, FR, UK

SUBJECT: FRENCH REACTION TO UK ABANDONMENT OF CHANNEL
TUNNEL PROJECT.

1. FOLLOWING COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING JAN. 22,
GOF SPOKESMAN SAID COUNCIL HAD EXPRESSED ITS REGRET
OVER BRITISH GOVERNMENT DECISION TO ABANDON CHANNEL
TUNNEL PROJECT. SPOKESMAN STRESSED THAT GOF
REMAINED ATTACHED TO PROJECT AND THAT FRENCH SIDE HAD
FULLY LIVED UP TO ITS COMMITMENTS. HE SAID THAT
WHILE QUESTION OF COMPENSATION FOR FINANCING ALREADY
PUT INTO PROJECT HAD NOT BEEN RAISED AT MEETING, IT
WOULD CERTAINLY BE DISCUSSED BY COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE. LASTLY, HE
NOTED PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S VIEW THAT BRITISH
DECISION HAD DASHED THE HOPES OF A PART OF NORTHERN
FRANCE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THE TUNNEL PROJECT.

2. PRIOR TO COUNCIL MEETING, THE ONLY OTHER GOF
PUBLIC REACTION HAD BEEN BRIEF COMMUNIQUE GIVEN TO
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PRESS ON JANUARY 20 BY STATE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORT

CAVILLE IN WHICH HE INDICATED THAT GOF HAD NOT CONSIDERED PROBLEMS POSED WERE INSURMOUNTABLE AND REGRETTED ABANDONMENT OF PROJECT. FRENCH CORPORATION FORMED FOR TUNNEL PROJECT ALSO VOICED ITS EVIDENT DISAPPOINTMENT. AFP COMMENTARY ON JAN. 20, DRAWING ON VIEWS OF FRENCH TUNNEL CORPORATION AND DOUBTLESS ALSO SOME GOF CIRCLES, WAS MOVED TO ALMOST LYRICAL MIXING OF METAPHORS IN ITS COMMENTS ON "SEVENTEEN YEARS OF EFFORT NOW GONE DOWN THE DRAIN": THE BRITISH "HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE BACK THEIR MARBLES", THUS BRINGING TO AN END THIS "BATTLE OF WATERLOO OVER THE TUNNEL THAT WAS LIKE AN AERIAL DOGFIGHT BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE TWO TUNNEL CORPORATIONS IN THE PERIOD NOV. 26 TO JAN. 15."

3. MAYOR OF CALAIS HAS VOICED SPECIAL DISAPPOINTMENT OVER ABANDONMENT OF PROJECT IN WHICH HE AND HIS REGION HAD OBVIOUS INTEREST FOR REASONS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

4. LE MONDE OPINION IS SUMMED UP IN JANUARY 21 EDITORIAL TITLED "GREAT BRITAIN REMAINS AN ISLAND". TO SAY THAT MR. WILSON LACKED "THE IMAGINATION AND, EVEN MORE, THE POLITICAL WILL" TO GO THROUGH WITH THE TUNNEL PROJECT IS "A EUPHEMISM", NOTES LE MONDE. EDITORIAL GOES ON TO SITUATE BRITISH ABANDONMENT OF TUNNEL PROJECT IN CONTEXT OF WHAT IT VIEWS AS "DISASTROUS" SERIES OF FAILURES AND HALF-FAILURES OF BRITISH POLICY CULMINATING, OF COURSE, IN UK DESIRE TO RENEGOTIATE TERMS OF ITS ACCESSION TO THE ROME TREATIES. IN INTERESTING BUT PERHAPS IRRELEVANT DEVELOPMENT, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT BERKHOUWER HAS PROPOSED THAT A "COMMON EUROPEAN ENTERPRISE" BE UNDERTAKEN TO INSURE THE TUNNEL'S CONSTRUCTION, ACCORDING TO LE FIGARO.

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OPIC-03 SP-02 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01

SS-15 H-01 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 USIA-06 /103 W

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R 231724Z JAN 75

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5. COMMENT: FRENCHMEN WHO GENUINELY FAVOR CONTINUED UK MEMBERSHIP IN EC (AND THIS INCLUDES GISCARD AND SAUVAGNARGUES) WILL BE DISAPPOINTED BY PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF UK TUNNEL DECISION, WHICH DRAMATIZES UK'S SEPARATION FROM EUROPE AT JUST THE TIME WHEN EUROPEANS (AND PERHAPS BRITISH) NEED EVIDENCE OF BRITAIN'S CONNECTION TO EUROPE. FRENCH WILL BE ASKING THEMSELVES WHETHER THIS MOVE STRENGTHENS OR WEAKENS REFERENDUM CHANCES OF PRO-EC FORCES IN UK. INITIAL READING HERE IS THAT ANTI-MARKET FORCES IN UK HAVE GAINED A POINT.

6. GOF'S EXPRESSION OF REGRET OVER BRITISH ABANDONMENT OF CHANNEL TUNNEL PROJECT IS OF COURSE INEVITABLE AND COMES EASILY, ESPECIALLY AS FRENCH CAN RIGHTLY CONTEND THAT THEY LIVED UP TO THEIR SIDE OF THE BARGAIN. HOWEVER, WE SUSPECT THAT THERE MAY BE A HOLLOW RING TO PROFESSIONS OF REGRET AT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LEAST BY GOF. TIP-OFF MAY HAVE BEEN CAVAILLE'S STATEMENT OF JAN. 20 WHICH WAS RATHER LACONIC AND CERTAINLY NOT COLORED BY ANY OF THE EMOTION THAT CHARACTERIZED GOF STATEMENTS WHEN, FOR EXAMPLE, FUTURE OF THE CONCORDE PROGRAM WITH THE BRITISH WAS UP FOR CONSIDERATION LAST YEAR. IN SHORT, GOF REACTION MAY BE ONE OF MORE SORROW THAN ANGER; FRENCH INTERESTS (AND GOF GUARANTEE OF FINANCING) ARE NO LONGER COMMITTED TO MAMMOTH, COSTLY PROJECT IN THIS PERIOD OF INFLATION AND RAPIDLY ESCALATING COSTS, WHILE GOF IS BLAMELESS VIS-A-VIS FRENCH PRIVATE AND LOCAL INTERESTS

CONCERNED SINCE FULL ONUS FOR ABANDONMENT OF PROJECT
RESTS WITH BRITISH. GOF MAY THUS HAVE SEEN LIGHT AT
THE END OF THE TUNNEL GROWING EVER DIMMER AND SO
MAKES THE NOISES OF AN ADMITTEDLY JILTED--BUT PERHAPS
VERY RELIEVED--SUITOR...TO THROW IN A COUPLE OF MIXED
METAPHORS OF OUR OWN.
RUSH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONSTRUCTION, FINANCE, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS, TUNNELS, JOINT VENTURES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PARIS01966
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750025-1058
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750126/aaaaaxbz.tel
Line Count: 176
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <14 APR 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <15 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH REACTION TO UK ABANDONMENT OF CHANNEL TUNNEL PROJECT.
TAGS: ELTN, FR, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006